

Article 22 – You cannot manage what you cannot measure

My grandmother achieved a certain notoriety among the family for the cakes that emerged from her kitchen on a regular basis. Fruit cakes, sponges and her signature creation - the gingerbread cake. Not all were shoo-ins for top prizes in the local CWA competitions for one of the key characteristics of my grandmother's cake making was her disdain for the basic principles of quality control.

She never weighed any ingredient and so among the production would be gravity fruit cakes where all the fruit lay like a drainage layer beneath the sand and top soil, and ginger bread suffering from a surfeit of treacle, resulting in a consistency that caused it to stick resolutely to the roof of the mouth.

Most of her cakes were delicious but the inconsistent quality, brought about by the lack of measurement, would have reduced Edwards Deming to tears and torpedoed any chance she might have had in supplying McDonald's.

However, it's one thing measuring tangibles like cake ingredients, quite another when it comes to measuring something as intangible as workgroup effectiveness.

However, this is what our new survey – **Towards 10,000** - does. Actually it does far more than that because in addition to measuring the effectiveness of a workgroup from the perspective of the members themselves, it analyses the feedback and prescribes initiatives that will improve the workgroup's performance.

Towards 10,000 or $\tau 10^T$ as we call it has been a long-time coming but we are now aiming to have it up and on-line by February next year.

Those clients of mine who have helped with the development of $\tau 10^T$ will know of my scepticism with regard to "team building" programs where the emphasis is on developing teamwork by focusing on interpersonal skills and relationships. You can no more train people to openly communicate with, trust and respect one another than you could have convinced my grandmother to measure her cake ingredients. The reality is that the group characteristics that we like to call "teamwork" are a by-product of small groups of people mutually and individually responsible for achieving common performance goals.

$\tau 10^T$ is soundly based on empirical research by consultants and academics but it also draws heavily on my own personal experience when working as a business development manager in the industrial explosives industry. I worked from our Brisbane office with the other three members of the team based in Melbourne. Our common purpose was to sign up mining companies to long term contracts for the supply of bulk explosives. At the time, there was a massive round of investment in new coal mines in Central Queensland and as each mine received the go-ahead, our goal was to make sure that they would select our explosives system over our competitors' in preference to adopting a DIY approach. My role was to handle the commercial side of things with the other three members of the team providing accounting, operational and technical know-how. The final score was played 7, won 5 and drew 2 – the latter being the two instances where the mines elected to mix and deliver the explosives themselves. I never remember the word – team – ever being mentioned but if one defines a team as:

“A small number of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose, performance goals, and approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable”

then we met that definition to a T. The team remained in existence for about three years and they were easily the most satisfying years of my time in industry.

It would be naive to think every workgroup in an organisation could evolve sufficiently to meet the team criteria but it's not unrealistic to believe that every workgroup could become more effective than it is at present, given a means of measuring and improving its performance. This is what $\tau 10^T$ does.

One of the key findings from our customer surveys is that customer satisfaction levels are largely out of the hands of senior management. Instead they rest with the most junior members of a professional services firm or the people who pick the orders or the reps who service the customer's needs. The focus should be put on raising the level of performance of those that make up the base of the pyramid.

Eliminate the triple bogies. Get rid of the gravity fruitcakes.

$\tau 10^T$ provides a cost-effective tool for assessing, monitoring and improving workgroup performance across an organisation's entire staff.

In short, $\tau 10^T$ provides the measure so that the total program can be managed. And to complete the adage – what gets measured, gets done.

Graham Haines
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